

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Istook Heads Coalition to Protect Public Displays of Religious Expression

Religious Protection Amendment introduced with more than 100 co-sponsors

Washington, D.C. – Today Rep. Ernest Istook (R-OK) and Sanford Bishop (D-GA) led a bipartisan coalition of over 100 Congressmen and several pro-family groups in introducing a constitutional amendment to protect religious expression on public property. The group held a press conference near the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court.

The proposed Religious Freedom Amendment (RFA) would reverse this week's Supreme Court order that the Ten Commandments must be removed from a Kentucky courthouse. The amendment also would protect voluntary prayer at schools and other religious speech on public property.

Istook, the lead sponsor of the proposal, said:

“The Supreme Court has sent a clear message to public officials everywhere: They will face an onslaught of expensive litigation unless they remove the Ten Commandments from public property. Intolerant people have been attacking the Ten Commandments, the Pledge of Allegiance, voluntary prayers at school, and other religious expression, but this amendment will halt those attacks. The courts are using the First Amendment to attack religion, when they should be using it to protect religion. Unfortunately, only a constitutional amendment can fix this problem.”

The Religious Freedom Amendment is modeled after an earlier version that was supported by a majority of House members in 1998 vote, but did not receive the necessary two-thirds. The proposed text (58 words) reads:

“To secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience:

--The people retain the right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage, and traditions on public property, including schools.

--The United States and the States shall not establish any official religion nor require any person to join in prayer or religious activity.”

“We can’t stay silent and accept decisions like we’ve seen this week, which is only the latest in many years of bad rulings,” said Istook. “When judges overstep their boundaries, as they have here, we have only two lawful options: Either impeach the judges or amend the Constitution to reverse their rulings. Only the constitutional amendment undoes these bad precedents and guarantees that all courts must change course in the future.”

A constitutional amendment must pass by two-thirds in the House and Senate, and then be ratified by three-fourths of the nation’s 50 states, with no approval or other role involving the President or the Governors.

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